

# CHAPTER 4

## ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

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### 4.1 AESTHETICS

#### 4.1.1 SETTING

From the perspective of CEQA, the term “aesthetics” pertains to the perceived visual quality of an area characterized by one or more visual elements such as an open space, scenic view, or architecture. Aesthetically significant features can occur in a diverse array of environments, ranging from urban centers to rural agricultural lands to natural woodlands. A project can have significant impacts on visual quality if it negatively affects the aesthetically significant features by altering them in part or wholly, e.g., by destroying vegetation integral to a scenic vista, or by constructing a building in an architectural style that conflicts with the existing setting.

The visual setting of the program would be primarily urban metropolitan areas. Surrounding land uses would include primarily mixed-use residential, commercial, and industrial. FIG installation would occur predominately in existing disturbed corridors for public and utility rights-of-way.

Scenic resources, including highways, historic buildings, and natural features, are typically described in city and county general plans. In addition, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) lists scenic highways that are officially designated or considered eligible in the state scenic highway system. These resources could all potentially be located within the study area.

#### 4.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

There are no federal aesthetics permits or regulations applicable to the proposed program. The California Department of Transportation has a program for designation of roadways as State Scenic Highways which entails regulation of land use and density, design of site and structures, signage, landscaping and grading, and undergrounding of utility lines within the roadway’s view corridor. Such regulation is performed by the local jurisdiction. No State Scenic Highways should be impacted by the proposed program in the study area.

Local planning guidelines are included in city and county general plans to preserve and enhance the visual quality and aesthetic resources within the plan’s jurisdiction. The zoning ordinance is a primary method to implement the goals and objectives of the general plan. The value attributed to a visual resource generally is based on the characteristics and distinctiveness of the resource

and the number of persons who view it. Vistas of undisturbed natural areas, unique or unusual features forming an important or dominant portion of a viewshed, and distant vistas offering relief from less attractive nearby features are frequently considered to be scenic resources. In some instances, a case-by-case determination of scenic value may be needed, but often there is agreement within the relevant community about which features are valued as scenic resources.

### 4.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### ***APPROACH TO ANALYSIS***

The fundamental approach used to analyze the aesthetics impacts of the proposed program is to identify the visual changes expected to result from program implementation and, on the basis of significance criteria, to evaluate the significance of such changes. The expected changes were identified based on information presented in the Project Description, Chapter 2. In assessing the effects of SCG/SDG&E's proposed program on visual resources, the sensitivity of an area to FIG installation disturbance and the type and duration of the disturbance were considered.

#### ***SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA***

The analysis of the significance of the impacts of SCG/SDG&E's proposed program is based on the CEQA Environmental Checklist criteria contained within Appendix G of the CEQA *Guidelines*. In general, a project would be considered to have a significant aesthetic impact if it would result in substantial changes to visual resources considered to have aesthetic value. Such changes include visible alteration of landforms, significant structures, visual clutter or disorder, or substantial disruption of the surrounding visual context, especially if such changes were to have more than temporary duration.

#### ***IMPACT MECHANISMS***

The FIG installation likely involves changes to the natural or built environment and thereby may cause impacts on the visual environment. Visual impacts of the proposed program could potentially result from construction-related ground disturbance or vegetation removal. The significance of an impact would be based on several factors, such as the existing visual character of the area, the expectations and number of individuals viewing the area, and the location of the impact (foreground, middle ground, or background).

#### ***IMPACT ASSESSMENT***

The aesthetic values that are important in one area can be relatively less important in another area, indicating the complex nature of aesthetics. Preferred architectural style, expectations for landscaping, and tolerance for visual clutter are common discriminators of aesthetic values. Context is also an important consideration in assessing aesthetic impacts. For example, construction of an equipment shelter could be expected to have little if any visual impact in an

industrial area, but might have a significant visual impact if located in an area of otherwise undisturbed vegetation.

To assess the effects of the proposed FIG installation on visual resources, two factors were considered: (1) the sensitivity of the study area to disturbance, and (2) the type and duration of disturbance associated with the proposed program.

In general, the proposed program would have minimal aesthetic impact. SCG/SDG&E's proposed program would consist of conduit installation within existing underground natural gas pipelines commonly found within previously disturbed rights-of-way or in public roadways. Pipeline access points would be flush with ground level or in otherwise unobtrusive locations.

The construction phase would be the primary source of disturbance to the visual setting associated with the proposed program. The proposed installation process would require holes in road rights-of-way to access pipeline entry/exit points and would cause surface disturbance for a short period during installation, but otherwise would have minimal, if any, long-term visual impacts. Temporary construction staging areas would also be utilized for equipment and material storage typically on cleared, disturbed areas.

SCG/SDG&E has designed the program to include management, construction methods and practices, and other approaches that would avoid or minimize program impacts and ensure compliance with applicable standards and regulations.

**Impact AES-1: Possible temporary, minor changes to the resources visible from a scenic vista or State Scenic Highway might result from construction activities and FIG operation.**

The proposed program would not have an adverse effect on a scenic vista. The FIG technology was designed for implementation in a densely built-out urban setting unlikely to be included in a scenic vista, given their location primarily within the rights-of-way of developed public roadways and utility corridors. However, where the potential pipeline access points for FIG installation may be included within a scenic vista, its presence would have minimal if any aesthetic impact, in view of (1) their underground location, (2) the limited amount of machinery and construction disturbance involved with the FIG installation methods that would be employed, and (3) the short duration of construction activities. Installation of conduit using FIG technologies would have no long-term aesthetic impacts.

Additionally, all construction related impacts would be short-term and would avoid impacts to scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. Therefore, no impacts to State Scenic Highways are expected.

For these reasons, this impact would be less than significant.

**Mitigation Measure:** No mitigation required.

**Impact AES-2: Possible minor changes in the existing visual character or quality of a site might result from construction activities and FIG operation.**

As discussed above, in general, the proposed program would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the visual environment within the study area because of the short duration of possible construction-related impacts and the minimal long-term effects of the proposed program.

Implemented of FIG includes installing conduit within existing underground natural gas pipelines and would therefore not be visible after site clean-up and restoration. Pipeline access points excavated as part of the construction process could potentially constitute negative aesthetic features, albeit of temporary duration.

**Mitigation Measure AES-2a: SCG/SDG&E would minimize visual impacts of program facilities and comply with local regulations, keep construction and staging areas orderly and free of trash and debris, and restore areas disturbed by construction activities to their pre-construction condition.**

This mitigation has been incorporated into the FIG installation design, but is included here to reiterate its importance.

**Significance After Mitigation:** Less than significant.

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